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T W O

LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Right Rev. PRELATES.

[PRICE TWO SHILLINGS.]

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T W O

L E T T E R S,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Right Rev. PRELATES,

WHO A SECOND TIME REJECTED THE

DISSENTERS' BILL.

By the Revd Mr Radcliff.



Bill read 2 March 1773

L O N D O N,

Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard.

MDCCLXXIII.

TWO

LETTERS

ADAPTED TO THE

RIGHT REV. PRELATES

AND A SHORT TIME RESPECTING THE

DISSENTING BILL



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L E T T E R I.

MY LORDS,

THE zealous and active part you have taken in the defeat of an application to parliament for liberty of conscience, intitles you to particular notice and distinction, and is the reason of my thus publicly addressing you.

Though you have denied us redress, you have not taken away the liberty of complaining, nor destroyed the force of any of those principles upon which our bill was grounded. We generally find the intelligent part of mankind think nearly alike, the same views of justice, utility and benevolence, lead to the same

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conclusions. The same motives and arguments which influence the resolutions of one branch of the legislature, most commonly influence the other. How it happens that religion should be an exception to this rule, that there should be such an unfortunate variance, on a subject not difficult to be understood, and that the same request should be reasonable and just in one place, and the reverse in another, is a difficulty which I cannot account for, consistently with that veneration which I wish always to feel for my superiors.

You have now leisure, my lords, to review the glory of your triumph, and to meditate on the improvement of your victory; your success will not be complete unless it be pursued. If the love of your country, the interests of religion, and the glory of God, have animated your opposition, you ought to advance farther. If you have been governed by other views, you have gone too far.

far. If dissenters are a dangerous body, and their doctrines destructive to society, you ought not to be satisfied with checking and restraining them: persecution and banishment are the gentlest treatment they deserve. But if their indulgence has done no injury to church or state, as long experience has shewn, what advantage could you propose by continuing the odium of penal laws without intending to execute them?

I should have imagined that separate from all motives of good nature, independent of all candour, humanity, and christianity, common prudence and policy would have taught you to grant an unlimited toleration, as the most plausible and effectual method of strengthening your establishment, and weakening your adversaries. What have you accomplished by your late signal opposition? You have reflected no honour upon yourselves, either in your civil or ecclesiastical capacity; you have given the world rea-

son to rejoice that your power is limited, and that you are not lords over our property as well as our faith. You have convinced us, that bigotry and spiritual despotism are not totally annihilated, and notwithstanding the freedom and liberal sentiments of the present times, that a very little encouragement would revive the tragedies of martyrdom again.

Had you only gratified your resentments in disappointing the hopes which a certain body of protestants entertained, and that upon the consciousness of their own loyalty, and the benevolence of their sovereign, it would not have been of any great moment, we could have submitted to our fate, from the remembrance of the sufferings which conscientious men have met with in all ages; but the wound you have given is more deep and lasting; you have stigmatized with infamy a religion which we trust in God will flourish whether we rise or fall; you have prohibited Christianity itself, and
passed

passed a censure upon the inspired writings, as if they were a cover to every pernicious doctrine, and the preaching of them inconsistent with the welfare of society, unless modelled according to the articles of your church.—How you can reconcile your conduct to the love of truth, and a regard for religion, I beg your lordships seriously to consider.

The prospect of higher dignity, and the applause of your dependents, may sooth and flatter you a while, but in a little time you will be upon a level with those whom you have injured, and you must answer before the judge of quick and dead for the scandal you have thrown upon the gospel.

In the course of this letter I shall endeavour to answer the objections that have been urged against the extension of toleration, that at least, if I cannot convince your lordships, the impartial public may see the merits of our cause, and be

enabled to judge concerning the motives upon which it has been rejected.

It has been condemned as a distrust of the legislature to apply for relief from the terror of penal laws, which neither *are*, nor ought to be put in execution.

Is it, my lords, a credit to any state to preserve laws which ought not to be executed, or can a better reason be assigned for their repeal? To be tenacious of retaining them contrary to all the reasons of justice and humanity, discovers at least an opinion of their propriety, and a design to enforce them at some convenient opportunity; but admitting that these suspicions are groundless, why should any but delinquents lie at the mercy of a precarious connivance? Why should protestant dissenters be denied that legal security which all other men enjoy? Discretion is the law of tyrants, and none but slaves ought to be subject to it. God forbid we should owe our liberty to a

dispensing power. We rejected it once with contempt ; and I hope we shall always do it upon the same principles.

But admitting we ought to be content with the merciful disposition of our governors, this is no lasting security. The prince who fills the throne, and the ministers who surround it, are not immortal ; we shall not always have so mild an administration, *so candid a bench of bishops*, or so catholic a body of clergy ; every age does not produce men so tender in the exercise of power, and so averse to take the advantage of the law. The common people, in other times, may be less disinterested and unprejudiced, and may make gain of information, and then, my lords, where is our liberty ? Will you engage to protect us ? I am strangely mistaken if the whole legislature of Great Britain could afford us any relief, unless by the same methods which would give us a certain and established security. I appeal then to your lordships, whether

our application has been rash, improper, or distrustful, and whether we could have been silent without betraying a consciousness of guilt, a desert of slavery, and an indifference to posterity.

For the honour of our government, no laws ought to remain which cannot be justified; and the idea of dormant statutes lying in ambush for future imaginary contingencies, is a reproach to our constitution. The advantage *we* should derive from the repeal of these penal laws is nothing to the benefit and honour that would result from thence both to the state and the church, by preserving peace and softening and reconciling the minds of a multitude of subjects.

To refuse a request, where the object is no more than a compliance with an innocent scruple, and where no dangers are to be apprehended, is undoubtedly declining an easy method of acquiring reputation, and reputation is power.

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It can be no man's interest to hurt a state where he is as free as he ought to be ; and Christianity must rather flourish than decay, when all persons are suffered to follow its dictates without controul. What then can be the pretence for intimidating us by dread, when we are capable of being influenced by the noblest of all principles, gratitude and affection ? If there ever was a sovereign on whose benevolent heart a people might implicitly rely with safety, mankind need not ask the security of laws ; but the prince who deserves such a confidence would be the first to disclaim it, and would never think his glory abridged by the loss of a power to do harm. When we recollect the wanton cruelty of the Stuarts, we cannot help blessing the unmolested ease of later times ; though persecution has not lost its sting, we can sit under our vine and fig-tree ; but why should the sword of Damocles hang over our head to spoil our repose ? It is an insult upon
us,

us, to suppose we should forget the dangers we are exposed to ; we cannot contemplate fines and imprisonment, though ever so contingent, with satisfaction ; we cannot be reconciled to such discipline, however salutary you may think it ; we cannot look upon such a situation to be necessary either to our present peace or final happiness ; we cannot conceive why the unfortunate belief of mere opinions should make so immense a distinction between the subjects of the same realm. Alas ! my lords, we have lost our ancient spirit ; we have felt the blessings of quiet and freedom, and have been accustomed to the worship of God without the idea of guilt or the apprehension of fear ; so that persecution would return with additional horror ; we are become fond of the protection of law, otherwise we might be thankful for the very *shadow* of liberty, and think our precarious situation far better than we deserved.

You

You may, perhaps, hold it proper, while you destroy the inquisition, to reserve the instruments of torture, assuring us, at the same time, that you will never make use of them ; that we may safely depend upon your generosity ; for you would not for the world inflict any pains for conscience sake. All this is infinitely obliging ; but, you know, the faith of an emperor was broken to one of the reformers ; Charles II. forgot his declaration at Breda ; and experience gives us but little encouragement to repose confidence in the honour of the most exalted characters. The comfort of the meanest individual in society ought not depend upon caprice and courtesy ; and we should be unworthy of liberty, if we did not ask it upon the only terms which can render it permanent and honourable.

The church has discovered a surprising reluctance to abandon any prerogative, however unjustly usurped, or unfit to be exercised. How meekly it has ruled, history speaks aloud in every page.

I proceed, my lords, to consider the nature of that toleration we ask, which, I doubt not, will appear as reasonable to every candid judge as that which we now enjoy. If you allow us to dispute your right in decreeing rites and ceremonies, you must much more allow us to question your authority in matters of faith, because it is the duty of Christians to acknowledge no infallible interpreter in the grand and leading principles of the gospel, and to be moderate and candid in matters of inferior moment, for the sake of peace and harmony.

An uncomplying temper in trifles may look like humour and captiousness ; but an opposition to the assumed power of determining the essential doctrines of faith is an indispensable part of integrity. We must disclaim all reverence for truth and religion, and all regard to the supremacy of Christ, before we admit any standard of faith besides the Holy Scriptures.

What

What reason can be given, why pleas of conscience should be valid, with respect to the forms of church government, and the manner in which Christian ordinances should be administered, and have no weight in things which accompany salvation? Our ancestors were, it is true, content with the former; but have they precluded us from seeking farther indulgence?

To the whole world we appeal, whether any inducements but those of conscience could have prevailed upon us to decline all the offers of a well-endowed establishment, for an unpopular party of Christians, among whom we can never expect any thing better than a mere subsistence?

Why then are we still to be under restraint? Have we rendered ourselves unworthy of future indulgence by abusing the favours we have received? This is not alledged against us by our bitterest enemies. Have we made any inroads
upon

upon the church ? We have engaged in no controversies about it, except in self-defence. Is it essential to the preservation of the establishment, to require an assent to its doctrines ? You know, my lords, it wants no such security ; and if it did, it is preposterous to expect such an uniformity.

Therefore, the present law of toleration requiring subscription, is partial and imperfect, and, instead of answering any good purpose, does religion the greatest harm, by imposing a needless test, and exercising an obnoxious power, which ought always to be avoided.

It matters not how we came to differ so widely from the nonconformists of the last age. We impute it to the improvements of knowledge, and a more free and careful discussion of the Scriptures. Whether we are mistaken or no, God is the judge ; to his bar only we are accountable ; and to his righteous sentence we submit ; you have no right to usurp
his

his province, or to execute his displeasure.

We are not the only persons who have swerved from the public criterion ; your own members are chargeable with this heresy ; and if tests and subscriptions, with all the allurements of honour and interest, cannot maintain implicit faith within your own bosom, how should you expect it among strangers who have no inducement to profess what they do not believe, or to conceal what they do ?

No persons can, with any propriety, be said to enjoy liberty of conscience who are limited in their enquiries, and bound to assent to certain systems of faith, whether they believe them or not, unless it can be proved that the articles of the church are self-evident, and that a dissent from them can, in no instance whatever, be pleaded as a matter of conscience, which, I believe, your lordships will not maintain.

To say we shall subscribe your opinions, and then we may follow our own ;
that

that we shall acknowledge your definitions of orthodoxy, and then we may consult the Sacred Scriptures, is only tantalizing us with imaginary freedom. If we have any doubts about a few unmeaning ceremonies, we shall be indulged with our scruples; but if we hesitate about things of greater moment, then we shall feel your resentment. If we will give our unfeigned assent to every doctrinal point which is demanded, only to prevent us from being perplexed about the unsearchable counsels of God, we shall not be controlled or molested in the exercise of our religion. What is this but asserting, that if we will but renounce our liberty in every important matter, we shall be free? What is this but a contradiction in terms? Is this, my lords, all the toleration the best constituted church in Christendom can afford? Call it not by so amiable a name; it is unworthy of our religion and our government; it is an indignity to our understandings; it is a
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ridiculous abuse of language, a piece of mockery which a Turk or a Papist would blush at. Avow your design openly, and tell us, that you did not mean toleration, but uniformity; and that you was resolved to promote it in the same manner that all establishments had done before you.

To this end, what is wanting in persuasion, you supply by terror; you satisfy all scruples by a fine, and resolve all doubts by imprisonment; you improve upon the plan of Christ and his apostles; and while they employed reason in propagating their religion, you make men's policy and interest subservient to their conversion.

The question at present is not about what degree of freedom contented our ancestors, but what is right in itself and agreeable to reason and Christianity? whether we are governed by faction and obstinacy in the request we make, or by justice and the common sentiment of

mankind ? whether Christ, or his substitutes, shall be ultimate arbiters in religion ? whether force and numbers are to fix the limits of truth ? whether any man can be said to have a true faith, who believes only out of fear, or fashion, or interest ? whether disputable points are fit to be established as a national creed ? On the determination of these questions we build our claim to the free and full exercise of our religion ; but we find it in vain to demonstrate our rights, while you are armed with a power which cannot be resisted. You cannot answer our objections, and yet you will not indulge them ; you are afraid openly to persecute, and as unwilling openly to tolerate ; and thus, with a constitution you cannot defend, and power you dare not exert, you have recourse to the infamous expedient of a cessation of hostilities, without an actual pacification, and without reducing that formidable armament which may be brought into action against us in an hour when we are not aware.

This is the true spirit of bigotry, which adheres invariably to usage and custom, and, without either wisdom to discern the propriety of reformation, or courage to risk its consequences, creeps on in the same servile tract from age to age, sacrificing every thing to ambition, ease, and political tranquility. Hence it happens, that while every useful art and science keep advancing to perfection, in religion, the most interesting subject to human nature, there is no improvement; but all things continue as they were from the beginning. You have received the creed of your ancestors as a sacred deposit, and you have preserved it without the shadow of a change; in vain have philosophy, reason, and learning pointed out its blemishes and defects; in vain do common sense and the suffrages of the people call aloud for amendment; you gloriously maintain your resolution never to add or diminish one tittle; and tho' enthusiasm on the one hand, and infidelity on the other,

are making bold advances upon you, you will neither capitulate nor defend yourselves.

If some of your members are discontented, you pacify them with the artful rumor of an alteration; but the project soon subsides, and all is fixed again. Sometimes foreign or domestic troubles furnish an excuse for your inactivity; and one pretence or another is always at hand to palliate your indifference. Thus, like the laws of the Persians, your ordinances are immutable; and if reformation is to wait for your consent, will, I fear, remain so world without end.

My lords, if you consider the dissenters as partisans in religion, who have no motive for their separation but a splenetic petulant moroseness, and who only seek to establish one church on the ruins of another, you do them much wrong. The greatest blemish we see in any church is intolerance; and the greatest beauty, charity. We have observed all parties,

parties, in their turn, adopt and disclaim wholesome severities ; all sects have had their tyrants and their martyrs.

The American exiles stained the merit of their integrity with persecution ; and we ourselves have not been without our inquisition and star-chamber in miniature, to keep in awe the consciences of our brethren and dependants ; but experience has convinced us, and I hope it will in time all mankind, that charity is one of the fundamentals of Christianity ; and that no religion is worth preserving that can only be maintained by force and injustice. We will not disturb the peace of society about trifles, if they are not magnified by insolent bigotry and sanguinary zeal ; we will sacrifice every thing but truth and the rights of human nature to public order and decorum.

We can disapprove some parts of your constitution without violence ; we can differ from you, and yet acknowledge your merit ; we can read many things in

your service with admiration; we ingenuously and readily confess, that you are the first and the best of all established churches; and we should blush for a separation from you, which had any thing less for its object than the duty of all Christians, to obey the dictates of conscience, to assert their private judgment, and to stand fast in the liberty in which Christ has made them free.

I will promise you, my lords, for myself, and I think I can for every dissenter in this kingdom, that we will never use any weapons against your constitution but those which reason and argument furnish; and I wish every unfair and ungenerous method of attack were to be universally disclaimed by the consent of all sects and parties; then would our controversies be useful and honourable, truth would prevail, and virtue be the result of our enquiries; there would be no necessity for dissimulation; knowledge would not be checked by fear; and though some
might

might be unfortunate in their opinions, none would suffer for conscience sake.

I shall now, my lords, consider some exceptions which have been made against the dissenters proposed declaration of their belief in Christianity, which has been represented as fallacious and uncertain, and amounting to no security at all.

In the days of paganism, it might be asserted, that the enmity of a Christian to gentile superstition and idolatry rendered him a bad member of society, and unfit to be tolerated ; but one would not think the original principles of our religion were so far lost and forgotten, as to occasion a doubt whether they are inconsistent with government or no. Christianity has been disputed and contemned by its enemies ; but to charge it with the guilt of being *dangerous* was reserved for its advocates and champions. I am persuaded that the gospel of our Lord, while it gives us the most rational hope of the happiness of a future state, prepares us

for it by every sentiment and virtue that can adorn a public or a private station, and consequently that it forms the best citizen, and is most conducive to order and good government.

But if the profession of Christianity gives no title to the protection of the civil power, let it be dispensed with, and let toleration be granted without any reserve or limitation whatever, according to the rights of mankind. The dissenters have no scruple in signifying the rank and class they belong to in society ; but I am persuaded they never meant by their declaration to allow the right of the magistrate to demand of them any test in matters of religion ; and I hope, if they solicit parliament any more, it will be for an absolute and unconditional repeal of religious penalties, and for the same unreserved freedom their brethren in Ireland enjoy.

We should think it a strange concession in a country where our houses cannot be
entered

entered by force with impunity, to consent, that the recesses of our bosom should be invaded, the secrets of our heart rifled and exposed: our thoughts and principles are supremely independent of any civil power.

When we injure our fellow-citizens, we fall under its cognizance; till then, we ought to range free and unconfined wherever truth leads, otherwise every persecution in the world may be defended; for it is of little moment *what* tests the magistrate imposes, if he imposes any; he has as much right to enforce one as another. I am never safe but whilst his authority is confined to actual offences against the peace of society. This distinction is plain, obvious, and sufficient, and will for ever keep religion and government from being confounded together, or invading each other.

God forbid I should contend for a toleration that would exclude one honest man on the face of the earth, whatever
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he believes, and I will venture to say, however this latitude may startle some ignorant or bigoted minds, the more it is considered, the more it will be approved, till the reasonableness of it is as universally admitted as the clearest axiom in nature ; with these distinctions, the dissenters are ready to profess their belief of the scriptures, at the same time pitying those who contend for something safer and better, and abhorring the thought of attempting to change any man's opinion by force or compulsion.

Against the sufficiency of a scripture confession, it is urged, that innumerable errors have taken shelter under the countenance of holy writ ; but unless the obvious interpretation of it betrays men into false and absurd doctrines, no objection can be made against their being the best standard of faith, and the best rule of public preaching. They have an authority which no human institution can boast of, and the evils they have occasioned

ed have arisen from their being discouraged and suppressed, and from their being not impartially open to inspection and enquiry.

It is the fate of all written language to be misunderstood by the ignorant, and perverted by the wicked; and you cannot point out one test hitherto appointed, which has not been liable to the same abuse; and if inspiration cannot secure men from mistake, what can we expect from compositions of human device. If our errors affect our conduct in society, we are accountable to the law. If they only respect our future well-being, that is a matter of conscience, and belongs to the author of our faith. Christ has not delegated * to any body of men to alter, amend,

* There was a law in Rome, that no god should be worshipped without the consent of the senate; upon which Tertullian says, “ nisi homini Deus placuerit Deus non erit.”

When the bill for suppressing blasphemy was brought into the house of lords, it was opposed by lord Peterborough,

amend, or supply what is deficient in his religion, he does not implore the secular arm to convert men to truth, or to keep them in it; and the orthodoxy that is promoted by setting up a public criterion, and keeping it sacred by pains and penalties, may be called a parliamentary faith, but cannot be called a Christian faith.

If there be any such thing as a rational and defensible subscription, it must be to the scriptures, and the scriptures only. If I submit my judgment, it shall be to the authority of God, and not of man. Your pretence, my lords, to dictate to me what sense I shall put upon the sacred oracles, is a manifest usurpation. You claim the countenance of the civil power

borough, who said, that though he was for a parliamentary king, he did not desire to have a parliamentary God, or a parliamentary religion; and if the house were for such a one, he would go to Rome and endeavour to be chosen a cardinal, for he had rather sit in the conclave than with their lordships upon those terms. *Parl. Debates*, vol. viii. p. 49.

to justify you in it, and then you construe my disobedience to your arbitrary decrees into a contempt of the state, and to alarm the magistrate, you give a long list of the absurdities which scripture, when falsely explained, may give birth to.

Good God! that men who profess to to call this thy word, should speak of it in such terms; what could they say worse of the koran of Mahomet, or the arrantest imposture that ever existed?

If you cannot charge the dissenters with advancing doctrines inconsistent with morality, common sense, and civil government, (I speak not of dark ages, when almost all knowledge and truth were buried under scholastic systems of divinity, but of the present, when every thing is rejected which cannot stand the test of reason) the oblique insinuation of the clergy, that we have some dark designs in reserve, which we want to conceal under the disguise of assenting to the scriptures, betrays a total want of ingenuity and candour.

I appeal to your lordships, whether the doctrines preached by the dissentient clergy are false, seditious, or immoral, and yet they profess to build them on the sense of scripture; they may sometimes be tinged with enthusiasm, but it is peaceful and innocent. Are not their discourses often adopted by the ministers of the establishment, as judicious, manly, pious, and in every respect worthy of being delivered to a Christian auditory. You see the scriptures do not always lead men into superstition and absurdity; and when ever they do, it is when they are consulted under the influence of early prejudices.

God forbid the revelation he has given should be of so ambiguous a nature as to leave the most obvious points of morality obscure and uncertain.

We should have very little reason to be thankful for a more excellent rule than the light of nature, if that rule for want of being sufficiently explained, only tend-
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ed to confound our ideas of justice and truth, and required all the wit and learning of man to guard it against abuse. How long did Christianity subsist, and what mischief did it produce in its primitive state? It was a long time before creeds and tests were invented, and one part of the same church claimed a right to domineer over another, and I believe religion and morality were in as sure and flourishing a state as they have ever been since they have been so accurately defined and fenced round by penal laws. I have so much confidence in the care Providence has taken of public instruction, as to believe the scriptures will never occasion any material errors in faith or practice. I can never allow the church of Rome to have the least resemblance with the native simplicity of the gospel. When that enormous system of pride, ambition, and tyranny was projected, it was thought necessary to give it some colour, at least of sacred extraction; and, therefore, all the nerves

of sophistry were strained to trace out such an origin, many texts were interpolated, and others were perverted from their plain obvious meaning, the apocryphal books were called in aid, false translations were adopted, and, with infinite refinement and artifice, the book of God was compelled to give countenance to forgery, craft, and blasphemy: but as soon as the clergy had reached the utmost extent of the people's patience and credulity, and the Bible became the test of truth, this enormous fabric was shook to its foundations; and, as archbishop Tillotson expresses himself, that which the church of Rome should find fault with if they durst, is that there should be any such book in the world as the Bible; and, at the bottom, if they would speak out, the quarrel is against the scriptures themselves.

Now, my lords, how far your substituting any criterion of faith and doctrine in the room of the sacred oracles, justifies

fies a fufpicion of your being governed by fimilar views and motives, I leave the world to judge.

There cannot be a ftronger proof of the fcriptures containing the beft doctrines, than the enmity which impofture has conceived againft them, nor of their being fully clear and fufficient to regulate our judgment and practice, than the neceffity there is to take fo much pains to darken and perplex them, before they can promote any finifter designs.

It may be the intereft of political priefts to tamper with them, to fanctify opinions which they wifh to palm upon a deluded populace. It cannot be ours; we addrefs ourfelves to perfons who have an equal right of private judgment, and who will not give up their underftandings, fo that if we had any intereft to deceive, it is out of our power; but we have no intereft feparate from the caufe of truth, and the advancement of knowledge and virtue, and thefe views muft

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for

for ever debar us from abusing the privilege we contend for.

It is impossible for words to paint the image of our thoughts with such a degree of accuracy and precision, as to exclude the danger of a mistake; and, therefore, the utmost indulgence is due to the many errors which ignorance, prejudice, and misconception must occasion, and if this use had always been made of the imperfection of language, we should have had no reason to regret it, but it has furnished a plea to papists for setting up an infallible expositor, and to protestants for introducing articles of faith; yet that infallible expounder wants an interpreter, and these articles stand in need of other articles to explain them, so that we are as much at a loss as when we had nothing to trust to but the original texts.

It is a point far from being settled what is the object of subscription; some writers tell us, that the articles are to be assented to as articles of peace; others,
that

that we prevaricate, unless we admit them with a cordial and unfeigned belief; one party contends, that we may subscribe them according to any sense we can put upon them, and another binds us down to the strict grammatical meaning. By a resolution of the house of commons they are declared Calvinistical, yet Laud and the high churchmen of king Charles the First were professed Arminians.!

Wide and numerous as mens opinions are, they agree in one thing—to subscribe*; without this there can be no ordination, no preferment, no ecclesiastical dignity; and whether you are ac-

* Bishop Gibson complains, that the advocates for the Arian doctrine did not decline promotion on account of their not being able to subscribe, upon which Whiston observes, that though he himself had always, and Dr. Clarke and Mr. Jackson did after some time refuse all preferment which required that subscription, yet such examples are very rare, and the generality seem by their practice to approve of Lord King's grand expedient, not to lose their usefulness for scruples. Whiston's Memoirs.

quainted with them, or totally ignorant about their contents; whether you are doubtful or confident, a believer of a few or of all, you must declare your acquiescence without scruple or reserve. How such proceedings can be reconciled with strict honour and integrity, how you can arrive at the same end through such a variety of means, I leave every honest man of all other professions to determine. If there should be found a more liberal and ingenuous mind who is startled at this difficulty, he is treated more as an object of ridicule than veneration; and yet I am persuaded a sense of rectitude and truth will never be so far extinguished, as to suffer such inconsistency to pass uncensured; nor can it happen even in this unprincipled age, but that a profession which is founded in falsehood must end in shame and contempt.

Attend to the discourses of your clergy, compare the different sentiments which
are

are announced from the same pulpit, and tell me, my lords, what you have gained by superadding a test to the holy scriptures. Peace and harmony?—no; uniformity of doctrine?—no; the advancement of the protestant interest?—no; the suppression of heresy?—no. The very method you take to prevent variety of opinions, only multiplies them the more; for there will always be a disposition in human nature to revolt against a faith established by law, and to encounter doctrines which are supported by force. What then have you accomplished by subscription? You have increased dissimulation and hypocrisy, chicanery and ignorance; you have taught candidates for holy orders to shut their eyes against knowledge, and to tremble at conviction; you have made it necessary to invent jesuitical subtleties to justify that conduct, which, in spite of all that has been written by a Balguy, a Powell, or a Hallifax,

will be treated by the world in the manner it deserves.

But suppose it was necessary to compel all the subjects of this realm to embrace the same faith, have you fixed upon the most useful doctrines? I do not mean to discuss the merits of your constitution, or to derogate from the character of the reformers who framed it, but with the utmost veneration for the wisdom of antiquity, will you, my lords, maintain its perfection, will you assert it to be the most agreeable to the scriptures, and the most conducive to piety and virtue of any system that human genius is capable of devising*? If not, why will you

* With the pure, Christianity will be pure, and they that are otherwise will soon defile it, will either corrupt it with fables and absurd traditions, or turn it into licentiousness and carnal policy, as was evidently the case under the Roman empire, and might be shewn to be so more or less under every human establishment,—there are men who see and lament the consequences of long neglecting to review establishments, and suffering the public wisdom of past ages to serve here, and here only

you support it by methods which reason abhors, which Christianity disclaims, and which the most undeniable truths have no right to make use of.

Another reason which has been urged in behalf of a late determination is, that it was an act of self-defence against men who had formed deep designs against the peace of the church. I have heard it insinuated, that if the bill had been granted, the trumpet of heresy would be sounded, the church would be overturned, and the dreadful tragedy of the last century acted over again. Persons must be

only, for all following ones. They think there has been so much wood, hay, stubble, built on the foundations, as must take a considerable time to be removed, especially where they see some get no farther yet, than to doubt whether there be occasion to have any thing at all removed, or even to deny that there is reason either for attempting or so much as wishing farther reformation. But there are few christian princes who lay these things to heart, and divines have quite other things in their thoughts; their great business is to maintain what is established, and to dispute with those who find fault with it. Bishop Law's Theory of Religion.

little acquainted with history to ascribe the calamities of past times to a free and unlimited indulgence of religion, when it is evident, the least relaxation of that rigour with which the most foolish superstitions were prosecuted, would have reconciled the puritans, and kept the church secure whatever became of the state. To throw out the idea of danger, my lords, is either a mark of folly or wickedness.

I am convinced the oratory of all the dissenting ministers in this kingdom could not prevail upon one man to attempt so ridiculous a project as that of pulling down the hierarchy.

If any thing could add to your security in having so many able guardians in the upper house of parliament, and so much power and influence in the kingdom; it would have been a generous and ready compliance with the favour we solicited; it would have added nothing to our interest, weight, or numbers; and I should think it beyond

yond the conception of the wildest imagination in nature to form any terror, or to dread any evil from this poor scanty act of humanity*.

What advantage do you derive from seeing your fellow-creatures oppressed for what they cannot help? If their capacities are too weak to comprehend the mysteries of your faith, or their consciences too stubborn to obey the call of interest, they are to be pitied; but to en-

* A religious establishment without a toleration of such as think they cannot in conscience conform to it, is itself a general tyranny, because it claims absolute authority over conscience, and would beget particular kinds of tyranny of the worst sort, tyranny over the mind. These are the words of bishop Butler, and he has not scrupled to give it as his opinion, that even idolatry ought to be tolerated; for he says, if the principle of punishing idolatry were now admitted among the several parties of religion, the weakest in every place would run a great risque of being convicted of it, or however heresy and schism would soon be found crimes of the same nature, and equally deserving punishment; and thus the spirit of persecution would reign without any stop or controul but what should arise from its want of power.

vy them the privilege of one moment's repose, to sink them below the condition of the meanest rank in society, to keep in force laws, which if you executed all mankind would condemn you, only for the sake of awing and distressing them, discovers a cruel jealousy and cowardice.

When all men have liberty of speech, falshood and imposture are detected, the best arguments are successful, knowledge and truth prevail, and society flourishes.

An honest man suffers nothing by the malice of his enemies. Good government rises superior to the efforts of faction. The Christian religion has gained immortal honour by the most scurrilous abuse of unbelievers, and yet the church of England, which boasts of being founded on the gospel, and claims an authority which belongs only to inspiration, shrinks like the sensitive plant at the slightest touch.

Her safety does not consist in the purity of her doctrines, the equity of her

laws, and the learning of her guardians ; but in binding and gagging her adversaries, compelling them to acknowledge her infallibility, and applying to those who do not, the convincing argument of pains and penalties ; which is just the same as if I was to imprison or assassinate an enemy, instead of encountering him on fair and honourable terms.

If you want to secure your establishment, enforce your discipline, strengthen your alliance with the state, and exercise a more watchful attention to the principles of your own members ; but do not claim a jurisdiction over those who are not accountable to your bar, who disclaim your authority, who wear none of your badges, and who, while they lead peaceable lives, ask no church what they are to think, or what they are to believe, who are content with the exercise of their opinions, and neither seek to share your honours nor to destroy them.

I am told, that the opinions of a certain nonconformist divine, and particu-

larly his charge against the church of England as guilty of idolatry *, has given umbrage to the clergy, and furnished one objection against the repeal of penal laws; this has been represented as the commencement of hostilities against your constitution, which only wants a general toleration to produce the most alarming consequences; but, my lords, this accusation, if it be false, may easily be confuted without calling in any civil power. It may be determined by reason and revelation, whether or no supreme homage and worship are to be paid to God the father only, and whether the liturgy addresses it to any other person; the truth or falsehood of this allegation has no connection with the question, whether the dissenters shall be tolerated to the utmost extent of reason and justice, or no? On the other hand, to be induced by resentment against this, or any other, to hinder men

* See A Free Address to Dissenters as such.

from the investigation of truth, instead of suppreſſing, will only encourage them.

Dr. Priestley is not the representative of the Dissenters ; and his opinions are far from being the standard of their faith ; therefore, to single out one individual as an enemy so formidable that nothing but pains and penalties can confute him, is paying a greater compliment to him, and a poorer one to the church, than pride or prudence ought to have suffered.

He has not forfeited the protection owing to a peaceable subject ; he has advanced only opinions, and he has supported them only by *reasons*, which he leaves to his readers to receive or reject, as they appear to them convincing or otherwise. Here is no violence offered ; he has no recourse to poisoned darts ; he has no invisible armour or tutelar deity to shield him ; he uses none but fair weapons ; meet him on the open plain, confute him by argument and learning, and doubt not but you will have a fair hearing ;

hearing ; he has no act of parliament in his favour, no penalties to inflict, and no magistrate to keep him in countenance. The church is not so barren of champions, but some hardy veteran will step forth, who scorning to entrench himself in law and power, will seek no other victory but that of truth*.

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* It is with pleasure I embrace this opportunity of doing justice to the character of a man who deserves well of his country. I am persuaded, though he has been treated as an heresiarch and an innovating restless sectary, there is not a body of learned men in the world, except one, who would not cheerfully acknowledge him for a brother and a companion.

So far from confining his views to the narrow line of polemical divinity, there is scarce any branch of literature, which he has not successfully cultivated and improved.

He is one of those few men who do not advance new doctrines with a view to surprise the ignorant, or to acquire a character of uncommon penetration. The investigation of real and useful knowledge and truth is his favourite object, and the discovery of them his reward.

He thinks freely, and speaks and writes as freely as he thinks, following no authority, a slave to no system, he ranges uncontrouled by prejudice, fear, or interest.

It is beneath the majesty of government to engage in settling religious disputes,

Though he has had many difficulties and enemies to struggle with, he was as steady in maintaining his principles when his subsistence was precarious as since the encouragement of the public, and the patronage of a noble lord, whose discernment of merit will not be disputed, has made him independent. Cicero thought it his duty to shew the people the absurdities of the pagan religion ; and Dr. Priestley has rescued Christianity from those gross errors and mysterious absurdities by which it has been long obscured and disgraced, and reconciled it to sense and reason, and those fixed principles in which the liberal and intelligent part of mankind must always agree.

It is with him an invariable maxim, that truth, happiness, and virtue always mutually assist and support each other ; and that ignorance, folly, superstition, and vice are inseparably connected together. He looks upon it as the greatest solecism, that heaven should have given us mental faculties only to be suppressed, or that any benefit can arise to society from limiting them by secular laws and ordinances. He is the enemy of all pious frauds and religious errors, however dignified by authority, or rendered sacred by antiquity, being persuaded that mankind will be virtuous in proportion to the enlargement of their ideas and the rectitude of their judgment ; therefore he is not solicitous, in his pursuit of truth, what prejudices he may shock, what system he may overturn, or whose territories he may invade.

putes, which are often grounded upon metaphysical refinements. We have had many a piteous declamation upon the mischiefs arising from diversity of opi-

invade. He may, perhaps, express his mind more openly than timorous and delicate men would chuse; but as long as there are the same means of defending as there are to attack, it would be an ill compliment to any doctrines of reason and religion, to suppose they could suffer by honesty and plain dealing.

He has paid the tax of censure, which is generally levied upon those who dare to think for themselves; but though he has met with more insult and abuse than most men in the present day, I am persuaded he would not disarm his enemies even of the liberty of aspersing him. While his moral character remains unimpeached, he is content with every other reproach, and he thinks the approbation of the candid and deserving an ample recompence, - with them one genuine virtue of the heart will atone for a thousand mistakes of judgment. But bigots have no tenderness, no feeling; the want of faith is never to be redeemed; a scruple, a doubt fixes upon the most blameless life, irretrievable reprobation. If the doctor has called in question popular opinions without grounds, he will be the more easily refuted. But, let him not be silenced whether right or wrong; there can be no policy in restraining the progress of knowledge, unless it can be proved, that we have arrived at the summit of perfection, and that all farther improvements are to be despaired of.

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nions, although it is notorious and undeniable, that massacres, persecution, and rebellion, and all the evils that disgrace and ruin society, have sprung from the mad project of uniformity. Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, Descartes, Newton, never attempted to establish their systems by force, or to require universal conformity, and whether their doctrines were embraced or exploded, the world was not disturbed. The necessity of being unanimous, and that about mere punctilios, is an absurdity peculiar to ecclesiastics; and yet, with all the attempts to promote it, it has not succeeded. The clergy of the church of England are not of one mind, yet their establishment remains; and the variety of faith prevailing among the dissenters is of no more concern to it, than what is believed in China or Japan. With respect to the state, it is ridiculous to imagine loyalty, allegiance, and good behaviour confined to any set of doctrines; no opinions will

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secure

secure submission to bad government, or alienate it from that which is good. Are you, my lords, for stopping the free circulation of men's thoughts : to prevent debate and confusion, you must have recourse to an inquisition : but this would introduce a confusion infinitely greater than what you would suppress. Heaven defend us from an unanimity which must produce ignorance, hypocrisy, and stupidity!

A little contest is no great price to pay for truth and the privilege of expressing our sentiments without controul. Controversy on all subjects is the necessary consequence of the exertion of those faculties God has given us ; and what direful mischiefs does it produce ? The disputants grow tired, the public attention languishes, and all the eager clamour sinks into oblivion ; but that confusion which your compendious decision would create, by erecting a general test, and punishing all gainstayers, would be a calamity of a most
grievous

grievous nature, without bounds and without end.

If it be criminal to publish doctrines inconsistent with those enacted by law, neither Christianity nor the Reformation can be defended ; and if they were ever wrong, they must remain so, for success does not alter their nature. An establishment implies that only a certain system of faith shall be supported and rewarded, but not that every other shall be prohibited and punished. Is not this a sufficient distinction, without the aid of penal terrors ?

The conscientious friend of truth may bewail his misfortune ; let him not have reason to curse the iniquitous partiality of the law in distressing him for his integrity. You might as well fine and imprison him for a natural as a moral defect, and make an example of him for being blind or lame, as weak and erroneous.

If I demean myself as an useful and quiet subject, what has the magistrate to do with my creed ? Will it make me a better member of society to be a Calvinist, an Athanasian, or a Semipelagian ? Order and good government depend upon other considerations ; and a wise ruler, like an indulgent parent, makes no cruel distinctions, allows the utmost freedom to all, and takes from them the power of abusing it, by keeping the sword in his own hands. He may patronize one plan of religion, and annex to it some privileges and immunities ; but he will never obey the dictates of any party, nor devote himself to the gratification of their pride or their resentment, knowing that all national establishments are but too fond of power, too interested and implacable, and, instead of consulting the general good, have only had the artifice and address to confound the welfare of the community with their own preservation and aggrandizement. He will introduce
good

good customs, cultivate good manners, and direct that natural sense of religion, which is implanted in the human mind, towards morality and not to superstition. Above all, he will enforce the strictest laws for the maintenance of justice, order, and good government; and when these are faithfully and vigorously executed, peace and happiness, due subjection and harmony, will invariably follow.

What merits, my lords, can you boast to intitle you to sit in judgment upon conscience, and to punish what you please to call heresy? What do you think of those revenues and honours which rank you with peers of the realm? Is it not sufficient that you engross the lucrative advantages of religion? must you have an exclusive right to infallibility? must you monopolize both heaven and earth? must you bind conscience in chains, and the free-born mind in fetters of iron? Is this for the public good? Most disinte-

rested virtue! What infinite obligations do we owe you!

But “if we are peaceable and silent, you will indulge us with our private opinions, provided we keep them in our own breasts, but preaching is an *overt act*,” which will breed confusion, and a train of unspeakable mischiefs, which ought not to be tolerated;—unspeakable mischief, indeed, to—ignorance, superstition, and spiritual usurpation, which flourish best in the silent, gloomy shade of implicit faith; but unspeakable benefits and advantages to truth, knowledge, and liberty.

Tempt not the magistrate to forget his dignity, and to trespass the bounds of his authority; he will for ever repent having following your council. There is no evil to be apprehended but from his interposition; let him look on calmly and unconcerned, and all the differences about opinion will insensibly sicken and

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die; frequenting the same communion, repeating the same creed, cannot unite his majesty's subjects, nor can a different worship, or a different faith, separate them in any important national point.

Agreement, casual accidental agreement, upon metaphysical tenets, is the most precarious bond of union. We are bound together, thank God, by nobler ties, by our common love to our sovereign and to our constitution, we are united by our common zeal for the happiness of our country, and the glory of our common religion, though differently understood and professed.

These are the best and safest bonds, and I hope they will never want the additional sanction of a coincidence of opinions arbitrarily procured, to render them sufficient for all the purposes of a great and flourishing community. I will engage upon the known principles of human nature, and I have the experience of this country ever since it has been

wife enough to let religion alone, to support me, that an universal liberty to all divines to preach what they find in scripture, can never ruin this or any kingdom under heaven.

You may put a case which is not likely to happen, that a man under the pretence of conscience and liberty, shall preach against the first principles of religion, God's moral perfections, providence, and a future retribution; and thus undermine the foundation of those truths which have ever been held sacred in the world,—colour it as strong and charge it as high as you please.—

I shall, nevertheless, think there are better ways of counteracting the influence of such pestilent doctrines than by having recourse to the secular arm. I would try a thousand schemes before I ventured upon so dangerous an expedient. I would trust to the natural sense and feelings of mankind; I would oppose wit with wit, argument with argument, zeal with zeal; but

but I would not do infidels the honour of persecuting them. I would take warning from the credit which pains and penalties gave to Woolston's nonsense and Annet's scurrility, and guard against such fatal rocks. This, I am sure, will be acknowledged a prudent method in general with respect to the minutiae of religious worship; but another course is to be taken with relation to essential and fundamental doctrines.—This is the fallacy by which wise and good men deceive themselves. If it had not been for this distinction, persecution would not have had an existence in the world. Essential and fundamental are big and tremendous terms; but who is to be the judge, and what is the meaning you affix to these words? Essential to salvation? it is kind in the magistrate to be concerned about that; but he may be excused, the gospel has taken sufficient care of it upon easier conditions. Essential to the being of society? no; for then no society could

could subsist without establishing the same doctrines. Essential to protestantism? no; for, I apprehend, there is one common aversion to popery, among all the various persuasions that prevail amongst us, as a religion which invades the natural rights of mankind, and destroys every society but its own. You may magnify as much as you please the distractions arising from opposite doctrine; I defy you to produce one instance from history, in a civilized age, where, independent of the interference of secular power, they have done any material damage. Religious dissensions cannot continue long, but among those who are instigated by interest or revenge to keep them up: when all the motives are taken away but those of usefulness and truth, controversy will never be virulent or lasting.

If the magistrate does not throw out a bone of contention, but takes care that all parties shall be safe, and no injustice shall

shall be done on account of faith, there will be nothing to enkindle passion or exasperate revenge; animosity will die of itself, when it has nothing but novelty and the desire of victory to feed upon. The hierarchy would not have been overturned the last century, nor would it have been necessary to have shed one drop of Christian blood, had there been no object of contest but the merits of presbytery and episcopacy.

L E T-

L E T T E R II.

MY LORDS,

I AM no bigot to a party, nor will I ever lose my friend, or my charity, on account of any modes of faith or forms of discipline, which will very honestly admit of variety of sentiments. But I shall always think it my duty to oppose a system of religion, and a class of men who avow the principle of persecution. Avow the principle of persecution, I say; for I cannot distinguish betwixt the actual infliction of fines and imprisonment, and the retention of those laws under which they operate, as a check to men's thoughts and actions. For one Christian,

or one man, to talk of controlling another where he has no authority, and can suffer no injury, and in matters which God alone can take cognizance of, is the height of arrogance and presumption.

I am sure, my lords, you will join with me in lamenting the weakness of the fathers of the church, in having recourse to holy artifices and pious frauds, to support a religion which had its origin in the wisdom of God; but these were innocent and laudable means in comparison with oppression and violence, which at once set aside all the arguments for Christianity drawn from miracles and prophecy, and its own excellence and purity, and commit it solely to the protection of an informer.

If our holy faith can ever be destroyed, it will be by those measures you take in its defence; for it must always create a suspicion, that those who use any irrational and forcible ways of maintaining their religion, do it because they can find no better

If I was to allow you all the marks of a true and orthodox church, except charity, the want of this would disgrace them all. It matters little what establishment prevails, if the right of judgment, on which a just faith can only be founded, be taken away. I would excuse any resemblance to popery sooner than this black and horrible feature, separate from which, all beside is *nothing but* harmless folly and fanaticism.

Would you not, my lords, be sorry to have it believed, that the church of England can only subsist by terror and injustice? Why then will you not put so much confidence in the excellence of your religion as to leave it to the learning and talents of its members? Shew so much courage as to think yourselves safe, though all mankind are free; there is dignity and honour in the experiment, and whatever be the consequence you will never repent adopting principles so generous in themselves, and so worthy
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of Christianity. You cannot act otherwise, if you follow the rules and maxims of the gospel, and are willing to preserve any resemblance to the spirit and genius of its divine author. On the other hand, if you are solicitous only to maintain the outward form of a Christian church, and to stand upon the ground of a political constitution, you are sufficiently secure against the united attacks of all your enemies; your caution and fears are all superfluous, whatever becomes of Christianity you are safe. If your doctrines were infinitely more absurd than your most implacable enemies believe them to be; in the midst of those entrenchments by which you are fortified, you may set them all at defiance; for the history of the world cannot furnish one instance of the worst system of religion wanting friends and advocates, with so many emoluments to recompence them.

We tax not the state we live under with unkindness; we hold in the highest esteem

esteem the generosity and candour of our rulers ; but we must feel some regret, possibly some resentment, when the professed ministers and guardians of the law of liberty, officiously intercept the intentions of the legislature, and enter into a combination as warm and vigorous as if the church was in the last agonies of despair.

You are terrified, my lords, with a spectre, and in your fright say and do such things, as in your waking moments you can neither justify nor approve.

I hope this is not the most judicious zeal you can express. If this be the best proof of your affection, I am sure neither Christianity in general, nor episcopacy in particular, owe you any thanks ; your friends will lament your indiscretion, your enemies will have their revenge in your rashness, and posterity will blush for your intolerance.

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I now proceed to consider a few more reasons which had their weight in the late confirmation of penal laws. "The time in which we moved for relief was deemed improper." This stale and shallow reason, which would keep all improvement at a stand, has been assigned by men who allowed not only the justice of relieving protestant dissenters, but who asserted the right of all mankind to religious liberty without distinction.

Was there ever a convenient season for making amendments in a corrupt church or state? If the well-timing prudence of statesman and priests had always been consulted, we should neither have had liberty nor religion at the present day; we should not have been protestants; perhaps we might have been idolaters. It was not sure *too soon* to disclaim the horrid principle of distressing men for their virtue, their integrity, their religion. Christianity, after so many ages, had given sufficient time to determine

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whether

whether it might not safely be tolerated without limitation or restraint, and the honour of setting an example to the world in behalf of religious liberty, by giving it not merely a precarious connivance, but a certain invariable legal security, might have pleaded for the propriety of the present time. But it happened unfortunately, that the clergy had but just moved to be released from their subscription to the articles, and a compliance with one request might lead to a compliance with the other. It is therefore represented as an attempt inconsistent with candour and prudence, an ungrateful return for your past lenity; an insidious plot laid to compel you to declare for liberty or persecution, and as coming behind you when you were grappling with a powerful enemy in your own territories. Now, my lords, notwithstanding some distinction might be made between the petition of your own members and ours, I most devoutly wish
them

them not to be distinguished: I hope in time they will both succeed; and though a certain divine has condemned our interfering in your differences, as a kind of continental connection with which we have no business, I shall not scruple to express my warmest veneration for the character, conduct, and writings of the associated clergy; they may not be so numerous, as from the freedom of the age might be expected, but they have every merit beside to intitle them to the consideration of the state. It is totally foreign to the idea of a Christian church to require any thing but a Christian faith, and nothing but resolving all religion into the will and caprice of the magistrate can set aside their claim. I would give up thirty-nine thousand metaphysical articles before I would exclude one honest and worthy man. I pity a church which stands upon the ruins of conscience, and of whose preferments^x a Chambers cannot partake. It is of little moment what

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opinion

^x The Rev. Dr. Chambers, who refused the valuable living of St. Clement dans Lond

opinion I entertain of such a character, but I cannot help expressing my warmest pleasure in seeing so singular an act of disinterestedness in this unprincipled age; and, I must beg leave to say, that it is more than recompenced by the united applause of all upright and impartial men.

But the clergy at the Feathers have not employed the dissenters to fight their battles, nor is there any plan concerted between them. Our application was dictated by no political views, but was the result of a full conviction of our right and our deserts, upon the principles of conscience, policy, and Christianity; and it has been approved, I will venture to say, by the general sense of all ranks of people. Indeed no person can disapprove of it, who is a real and consistent friend of revelation; for it is, properly speaking, nothing but a proposal for the toleration of genuine Christianity, separate from all human commentaries and definitions.

Several intimations were thrown out by different ranks of men, that if the dissenters chose any farther extent of religious liberty, it could not be refused them at this period. It appeared shocking to them that statutes so scandalous to a protestant government, by which numbers of men of a liberal education, and unblemished characters, were exposed to the heaviest penalties, should still be upon record to reproach the pretences of this boasted land of liberty. Many among the clergy acceded to the reasonableness of our request, who were averse to the least alteration in their own constitution.

Under these circumstances, what an abject spirit must the dissenters have shewn not to have embraced so favourable a season? What cause had they to expect an opposition from your lordships, who of all men ought to be the most tender of the rights of human nature.

The administration did not object to our request, and it has twice passed the commons with a greater superiority of argument and conviction than any other bill can boast. The most independent character, the most consummate abilities and accomplishments, the most opposite parties united in the cause of liberty. Why need I mention the names of Savile, Dyson, Montague, Meredith, Townshend, Harris, in one house, or those of Richmond, Shelburne, Mansfield, Lyttelton, and Camden, in the other, who have done themselves immortal honour. Philosophers and Christians in all ages shall remember the honourable testimony they have paid to liberty and truth. I rejoice that the dissenters have gone so far, if they advance no farther; for as long as there is any regard due to the authority of wisdom and virtue, they must from this time date their protection as a real, and not an imaginary thing, in spite of the existence

of the statutes they complain of; the sense of mankind is their security, the conviction of their justice is their safeguard; and reason and humanity repeal those laws which only bishops confirm.

The defence which truth and reason have made against bigotry, ignorance, and superstition, is ours. The shew of a triumph, the name of a victory, is yours.

Victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catoni.

You may disappoint us of that security we ask for, but you cannot take from us the consciousness of deserving it; you cannot confute the equity of our claim, but you can vote against it; you cannot point out any evil effects that would arise from a more liberal toleration, but you can say with Felix, Go your way for this time, when we have a more convenient season we will call for you. But, my lords, some hints have been dropped concerning a scheme in agitation to unite

his majesty's subjects in interest and affection, touching ecclesiastical matters, to which our bill would be an obstacle. Now, though it may have been mentioned in conversation, and asserted in pamphlets, that some amendment of the Articles was upon the carpet, yet no competent authority has been produced for it, and the dissenters had no intimations given them, to induce them to suspend their application on any such account. What objection can this be to the removal of pains and penalties? and why should our proposal discourage your design? One laudable act of moderation does not interfere with another. Was it not a proper introduction to a reformation in your church, to grant liberty of conscience to all protestants?

If your motive was to bring over the dissenters, they are obliged to you; but they are not willing to purchase any favour at the expence of their principles or their duty; and whether they were
likely

likely to be reconciled or not, it was certainly incumbent on you to remove every obstacle to the admission of honest and conscientious men into your own communion. The discovery of truth, and the culture of pure unadulterated Christianity, ought to be the first objects among all Christians; and whatever clashes with these, is an abuse of the most enormous kind. If these are secured, it matters little what adventitious circumstances are given up or retained.

If you will remove every real ground of separation, we are ready to meet you with a correspondent candour and good will; but God forbid we should make any dishonourable concessions, inconsistent with the regard due to the supremacy of Christ, we will chearfully conspire with you against the common enemies of our religion; but we must stand upon our own proper ground, and assert those immortal principles to which a protestant dissent and the Reformation itself owed
their

their birth. Some ministers may be satisfied with relaxing a few of your ceremonies ; but the fundamental objection will remain as long as you exercise the power of imposing any faith besides that of the Holy Scriptures. You may render your yoke easier by soothing palliatives ; but nothing less than full permission to be tried by the Gospel will satisfy those who understand the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free.

The only way to unite all parties in interest and affection is to break down the partitions of strife and animosity, and to destroy those cruel distinctions, which can have no tendency but to inspire one set of men with supercilious arrogance, and the other with indignation or despair.

My lords, I am afraid you objected to our proposal, not because it hindered you from setting about an alteration now universally deemed necessary, but because it added fresh reasons and obligations to your making the attempt without delay.

If you meant to correct a few punctilios, that you might with a better grace enforce your absolute right of deciding in matters of faith, and then complain that the dissenters interrupted you by asserting the great protestant principle of being accountable only to the word of God, I am heartily glad of the obstruction you met with; for every error and blemish in religion is trivial in comparison with an uncontrolled despotism over judgment and conscience.

I cannot pass over one circumstance, which has been strongly urged as an argument against any indulgence towards the dissenters; I mean their opposing the settlement of bishops in America. This point has been so well considered in a public paper, that it is almost needless to say any thing about it; but as I do not mean to advance any falsehood, or to conceal any truth, I shall acknowledge, that some gentlemen did, at the request of the colonies, consult administration about
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the rumour of bishops being settled in America, and the intention was disclaimed in the strongest terms.

What were the motives that induced government to discourage this favourite project I do not pretend to say; they were not of a religious nature, and could not be attributed to any influence of ours. It might be imagined, that the necessity of receiving ordination here would tend to increase that connection and dependence, which it is the policy of Great Britain to cultivate. However, if we had taken the most active part against this measure, it would not have failed on that account; but we are not chargeable with any interposition inconsistent with religious liberty or the nature of our present application. I do not know one dissenter who opposed the institution of bishops as spiritual men, for the purposes of ordination, confirmation, and other spiritual offices. If you contend for any thing more, we cannot help declaring a sincere
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but generous opposition. An order of priests of such high dignity, such disproportioned revenues, with so much political influence, and so many lucrative benefices at their disposal, is so vast an addition to the executive power with which they are always connected, so burdensome to the community, so foreign to the simplicity of the gospel and the idea of a primitive episcopacy, that if their existence depended upon the consent of wise and impartial men, they would find it difficult to gain an establishment in any country upon earth. In Great Britain, they can plead a long prescription, they make a part of the constitution, and are exceedingly useful to any administration; and while they answer the end of their creation, I hope no rude schismatic will ever disturb their peaceful slumbers.

But if they shall pretend to monopolize truth, to stamp and licence what doctrines are to be believed and preached, as if they were the sole patentees of religion,

gion, I shall beg leave to dispute their title and apostolical authority. I will go on without scruple to advance and defend such doctrines as I believe to be the dictates of sense and reason; I shall always think I cannot better approve my zeal for Christianity, than by lopping off those absurdities, which have been grafted upon it with a view to embellish it, without being awed by the decrees of synods or councils. As a man, I will refuse no obedience which I owe to the community; as a Christian, I will give up no right which a Christian has a claim to. While the state gives me leave to exercise my function, I will shew my sense of its indulgence, by inculcating sentiments conducive to loyalty, public virtue, and peace. If, in compliance with your resentment and prejudices, it shall still be prevailed upon to keep persecution in suspense, I will never seek my revenge in one uncharitable wish towards your religion; but I shall rejoice that heaven
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has reserved one chosen spot upon the habitable globe secure from your arbitrary influence.

There, in the absence of episcopal controul, variety of opinions prevail without confusion, and the worshippers of one God can harmoniously join their different forms without discord or rancour. Free and happy abodes ! may no exclusive establishments disturb your peace ! may no bold usurper invade your rights ! may no favourite form of religion insult over the rest ! Let not ambition or worldly power corrupt your religion, or interrupt that equal freedom from which you derive such inestimable advantages !

If the consideration of the tyranny from which you fled, and the cruel restraints by which conscience is still limited, does but awaken you to preserve Christianity free from every profane violation, and to keep the balance of universal liberty in religion, you will have reason to bless a Stuart race; and our indignities and hardships

ships will not be without some alleviation. Perhaps you may profit by the event; for, I hope, my lords, you will learn to detest those inhuman principles of persecution, which are not only the scandal and ruin of society, but destructive to those who abet and employ them, since your influence now suffers in consequence of those measures you took to establish it, and America, peopled by your rage, is inflexible to your entreaties, and opens its hospitable arms to every stranger but yourselves.

In whatever light I behold your late opposition, it appears to me weak, indiscreet, and ungenerous; it adds neither to the strength nor credit of your church; it was losing an opportunity of acquiring real honour without any real sacrifice; it discovers a narrow contracted idea of policy, religion, and human nature. If it was the effect of bigotry and prejudice, you are inexcusable, as legislators, in being actuated by such base motives. If it was
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owing to resentment that you punished the sins of the fathers upon the children, it was utterly unworthy of the ambassadors of Christ. If you thought to accomplish uniformity of faith, it was absurd and ridiculous. You have taken one important step without considering the next ; and, by so doing, have exposed yourselves to the miserable alternative of being hated or despised. If you execute the laws, you will bring upon yourselves eternal odium ; if you let them sleep, you proclaim their impropriety and injustice. If you mean to promote an universal conformity to the articles, you must not only stop the mouths of all the nonsubscribing dissenters, but you must lay a restraint upon the press ; you must prohibit the intercourses of conversation, and lay an embargo upon the exercise of men's rational faculties. What an arduous task have you undertaken ! Yet all this might have been avoided, without risking one single advantage, had

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you possessed generosity enough to have complied with the dissenters' request. When I consider your critical and distressed situation; in possession of an obnoxious power which you dare neither exert nor relinquish, attacked by the enthusiast and the freethinker, importuned by your own dissatisfied members, and perplexed by the discontents of the laity; if you have any regard for religion and the interests of your country, my lords, I pity you; if you are attentive only to your own ease, ambition, and security, my pity gives way to indignation and contempt.

I beg your lordships candid sentiments, respecting the future conduct of the dissenters. How shall they act, so as not to offend the state or their own consciences? How shall they preserve both the deference which is due to your lordships' decision, and that which they owe to their Master in heaven? If they desist, they give up their claim; if they persevere, and you continue to refuse, they will

be the innocent causes of your sustaining additional dishonour.

You have put a negative upon the lawful exercise of our religion; but you cannot make the world believe that religion itself depends upon, or is connected with, the will of the magistrate. You have limited the freedom of the gospel; but you have not destroyed Christianity. Do you expect we should comply with your requisitions, or resign our professions? Cruel dilemma! But supposing we were extirpated, other dissenters would rise up; rational creatures will always remain to assert the rights of judgment and conscience; and shall they worship no God, and believe no creed but yours? The nature of things is not altered by your determination; and right and wrong are not to be decided by vote. Edicts and proscriptions were issued out against the gospel, and yet it continues the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Laws have been framed against philosophy and

science, and liberty and virtue, but they have not lost their reputation in the world. You may institute what opinions and articles you please, and enforce them by the heaviest penalties ; but if they cannot stand the test of reason, they will fall only the sooner for your attempts to support them.

Truth, immortal truth, keeps on her steady and glorious career, and advances to that perfection, which, in spite of your impotent efforts, she will one day attain. We should be unworthy of the name we profess, if we were awed into silence by the threats of punishment, which, be it ever so great, the approbation of heaven and the testimony of a good conscience will abundantly compensate. If you ask by what authority we propagate our doctrines? I answer, by the same which was pleaded by the first Christians, by the reformers, and which operates upon every honest man ; to resist imposture, however ancient and

venerable, and to defend truth, however forsaken and unpopular.

You may take all the advantages you please of your majority, your public fashion, and your power in parliament; you may avail yourselves of the prejudices excited against us, and propagated from age to age; you may excel us in grandeur and antiquity; we will contest with you the qualifications of good citizens and honest men. You may boast of the improvements you have made upon the original plan of Christianity; we are content with it, unadorned as it is, and hope only for its future rewards. You may represent us as disaffected to the throne; we appeal to the interest we have at stake, and to our past conduct, in confutation of this ridiculous charge. You may brand us as deists, because we dispute your authority to settle all controversies. If to be deprived of the common security of subjects, and yet to live peaceably and contribute all in our power to the security

of the state, be the mark of bad subjects, we deserve that appellation. If to distinguish betwixt Christianity and its corruptions, to preach and live under the warrant of scripture, and to inculcate sound morals, on the prospect of that immortality which was brought to light by the gospel, be a sign of deism, we have no objection to the name of deists.

But the frequent use of these invidious aspersions will take out their sting. The world is not so ready as it has been to follow the cry of a few designing men; the growth of heresy and the danger of the church have lost their dreadful sound; the worst Heresies that ever infested religion are at last found to be pride, ambition, the lust of gain, and the spirit of persecution.

Amidst your tender sorrows and anxious solicitude for the fate of your church, spare some sighs, shed some tears for Christianity itself, which, in this age, deserves your commiseration, wounded as
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it is, and bleeding before you, while the Levite only looks upon it, and the priest passes by on the other side.

Remember you had once an establishment more formidable than your own to contend with. The time has been, when you were glad to engage, like us, with the weapons of reason and argument, to commend your cause to heaven, and to appeal to the Bible as your only friend, against a religion armed with all the thunder of the state.

Consider, if the plea we urge has no weight in it, you would never have had the power to make penal laws, or to keep them in perpetual terror. You were once heretics as well as we. Your ancestors attested their zeal for genuine Christianity at the stake. Well had their lives been spared, if they were only the means of erecting another spiritual dominion as arbitrary as that which they overturned.

The Scriptures they had recourse to, as comprehending all their faith, are now

considered as an ambiguous proof of orthodoxy, and distrusted as too feeble security for religion and government ; they must now be read with caution and reserve, a thousand dangers lurk beneath, and they may betray us into I know not what fatal errors. Who would think their Christianity and yours were the same ? Upon what different grounds has the religion of this country been defended ?

To bar yourselves against any future conviction by a glorious resolution never to believe any thing against law, is something singular ; but to pretend to hold all the protestants in this kingdom in the same chains, to forbid the light of truth to shine, because you will not see it yourselves, is the most extraordinary exertion of folly that can be conceived.

How much better would you have consulted reputation by allowing a liberty you cannot take away ! how much more durably would you have fixed your throne
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by an act of well-timed generosity! with how much better a grace could you have treated with your own disaffected brethren, and removed every cause of separation and discontent!

You might have stifled our complaints, and put it out of our power to make any fresh demands; as the dissenters multiplied under oppression, they have diminished by indulgence, and you would have seen them melt away under the beams of your mercy, while your intolerance only strengthens and unites them.

At this time of day, my lords, when a spirit of dissipation ranges through all classes of men, when corruption is openly avowed, when public spirit and private virtue are daily losing ground; to what shall we have recourse for our reformation but the influence of religion? But when the maxims of Christianity and the church are at variance; when subscription to unintelligible doctrines is the

term of admission to our seminaries of instruction; when the first step to holy orders is a refinement upon the common rules of honesty; when the degree of faith and zeal for it is only in proportion to the present advantages it procures; when the Christian religion itself is not legally tolerated, but under certain limitations inconsistent with its genius and spirit; what can be expected but a general increase of superstition and infidelity? Is it to be wondered at that your places of worship should be deserted, your ministers disesteemed, and your influence over public manners at an end? Will it not be imagined, that superior sanctity and piety are a mere pretence; and that power, interest, and ambition, are the foundation of your extraordinary zeal and unanimity? When these suspicions are entertained, it will not be sufficient that you have the sanction of the law and the protection of the magistrate. The appearance of honour and justice, and the
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veneration of the public, are the most
 lasting securities of any constitution;
 and when these are gone, your immuni-
 ties will neither be held in peace, nor en-
 joyed with comfort. I appeal to the
 sense of all mankind, whether there can
 be a greater mistake than that of annexing
 the idea of guilt to religious opinions,
 which depend not upon our will, but
 upon our judgment, and therefore are,
 and must be innocent. An honest and
 virtuous disposition is not confined to any
 denomination or party; every faith that
 is accompanied with the fear of God and
 the love of righteousness will be accept-
 ed. Man would be of all creatures the
 most wretched, if, endued with a power
 of reflection and conscience, he was de-
 barred from following their dictates. If
 we must hold our convictions at the dis-
 cretion of another, we may justly envy
 the stupidity of the brutes. If it be cri-
 minal to declare what we believe to be
 true; if human laws could supersede the
 obliga-

obligations of honesty, society would only be established villainy. I would sooner see all the forms of government in the world perish, than consent to so detestable a maxim. What I believe to be truth, I am authorised, I am commanded by the God of Heaven to maintain, in opposition to every human authority. Indeed I cannot do otherwise, without allowing that the ordinances of the magistrate are the foundation of right and wrong, and that all actions are in themselves indifferent till their nature is ascertained by positive appointment. Do you profess, my lords, to be members of a church which adopts such principles as these; whose existence depends upon the annihilation of the rights of human nature, upon denouncing anathemas, keeping up fines and terrors, rewarding duplicity and prevarication, and punishing honesty and virtue?

We covet no such honour; we envy you no privileges which depend on such terms;

terms ; we abhor and disclaim the cruel prerogative of persecution for conscience sake ; we resign to you without regret all that this world can bestow ; we ask only an indemnity to our properties and persons ; and, in return for it, we offer all that government can require from dutiful subjects, and more than was thought necessary in the reign of Charles the Second ; we reverence the constitution, and are willing to hazard our substance and lives in its defence. Our obedience is not the effect of constraint, the purchase of large gratuities, or the extorted tribute of fear : we ask no independent revenues, no unalienable endowments. The friends on whose generosity we subsist are as forward in every act of bounty to the established church as any of its own members ; permit them to dedicate part of their munificence to the cause of truth and liberty, and to the support of those whom they believe to be honest and sincere. We boast of being the best friends
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to the house of Hanover, and it is our ambition to be disinterested in our allegiance. We have not one act of ingratitude to stain our public character, though we owe nothing to the state but the air we breathe, and the sun which shines as impartially upon a dissenter as a churchman. This is all we have to offer for the favour we solicit, unless I may add, that we will be the same whether it is granted or no.

But why should we be solicitous about any temporal securities and privileges, when we recollect what has been the fate of our religion in all ages; of what moment is our disgrace and oppression, when compared with the circumstances of those who thought it not too much to be accursed for Christ's sake and the gospel? or what comparison will our difficulties bear to the sufferings of the first professors of Christianity? It is but looking a little forward, and all penalties shall cease, and all fines shall be paid;

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we shall be released from every inquisition, and pay homage only to one judge. It is an article in our faith, though not one of the Thirty-nine, that both you and we shall one day give an account of our stewardship: and if there be any truth in the sacred writings; if there be any merit or praise in studying and conforming our faith and practice to them; if there be any shame in lessening their authority; you are the persons deserving of compassion, and not we: and when the proceedings of human judicature are re-examined, you may perhaps find your own defeat the greatest.

But it is not too late, my lords, to retrieve your character as guardians of the Christian faith; and, as a proof of my friendship, I will tell you how it may be done. Disavow all your past measures; acknowledge that your late opposition sprung from ignorance, imprudence, and a mistaken zeal for your constitution. Give the dissenters all they
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ask without delay, lest the reproaches of the world compel you to do it with a worse grace hereafter. Do not confound your principles with those of the state, nor your cause with that of Christianity, for fear they should disown your alliance. Ask pardon of Heaven for calling its inspired gospel to be tried by the criterion of your Articles ; and for deeming those unworthy of the common benefits of society, who are not excluded from the communion of saints and angels. Embrace with cordial affection the dissenters as branches of the same family, and friends of the same religion, however differently understood. Remember, that if they are mistaken, it is their loss, not yours. Pity their scruples, if you please, but do not censure and condemn them. Shew them some respect for their services in defence of a religion, with which you still profess to hold some connection. When you have advanced so far, proceed to remove those blemishes
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in your own church, which some of your brightest ornaments have excepted to as furnishing matter of triumph to the infidel, and encouragement to enthusiasm and fanaticism. Banish those tests which in your candid moments you must allow to be a bar to none but conscientious minds. Let all the parts of your liturgy which relate to the peculiars of Christianity be expressed in scripture language, as that which infinite wisdom approved, and human skill cannot amend. Provide a better security for your hierarchy than oaths and subscriptions, by making it the interest of all good men to support it. Let the discipline of your church be its security. Let your immunities be protected by law; but let your religion be established in truth, and do not have recourse to those artifices and compulsory methods, which would defend imposture and impiety itself.

When you have done all this, you will have no adversaries but those of reason

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and common sense. Distraction will cease, and animosity and schism be known no more. None will separate from you but those whose weakness and petulance are to be pitied, and their separation will be the greatest punishment you will ever think of inflicting.

Every liberal heart will be united, every upright hand will be lifted up in your defence; your dominion being founded in truth, and not in tyranny, will be obeyed out of esteem and conviction, and not out of fear.

Thus, my lords, I have expressed my sentiments without fear or reserve; and,

I flatter myself, I have weakened the force of some objections against the dissenters' bill. If they prove instrumental in procuring it a more favourable reception hereafter, I shall be thankful: I hope at least they will tend to set the opinions of men who are justly aggrieved, in such a light as shall make the attempt to persecute them more shameful and odious.

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If you want to see this subject more fully discussed, I beg leave to recommend to your lordships' perusal, the pamphlets of Doctors Kippis and Furneaux, and Mr. Mauduit, which are so excellent and convincing, that if we were indebted to our late application only for these productions, we should have had no reason to repent having made it. I am not conscious of shewing any want of deference to your lordships' character and rank; but if you think otherwise, I hope you will impute it to my superior regard to truth and Christian liberty.

I have not written this in concert with, or under the direction of any set of ministers, and they are not chargeable with any blame incurred by the manner or matter of this address. I cannot tell what methods of redress are in agitation, nor what success they will meet with from the legislature, but I hope they will never desist prosecuting their just

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right, till the state either proclaims them free, or seals their lips in everlasting silence; one of these two alternatives must prevail, and till then, my lords, be assured this generation shall not pass away without being witness of their unwearied endeavours to vindicate the liberty wherewith nature and Christianity have made them free: they will temperately, but steadily pursue every measure which the English constitution permits to all its subjects for the recovery of their privileges; they will still continue to defend such principles as they believe to be agreeable to truth, scripture, and reason, without asking whether they are tolerated by foreign churches or established by your own, for we hold these propositions indispensably sacred,—that magistracy has no right to take cognizance of sentiments and opinions, till they have produced criminal overt acts, evidently injurious to society:—that a power of judging what doctrines are tolerable,

lerable, belongs to no human creature; and, if granted, would justify all the persecutions in the world:—that no church has a right, either from the state, or the scriptures, to prescribe articles of faith to another:—that inspiration only, and divine authority are entitled to implicit submission:—that the tenets of all sectaries in this country may be safely indulged in their utmost extent, without the least prejudice to the community:—that the scriptures contain every thing necessary to salvation, and that a belief of them, and obligation to preach according to their standard, is a better security for true religion, and every good end that can be answered by public preaching, than the articles of the church of England, or any other yet made the test of church communion:—that an uniformity of faith is impossible;—and, if possible, unnecessary:—that the usurpation of a power over conscience is the grand cha-

rafteristic of the church of Rome, and that the retention of it is a retention of the worst part of popery.—These are our sentiments,—and if you grant us these, we are bound to you in interest and affection, and we shall chearfully co-operate with you in every laudable design to promote the happiness of our country, and the honour of our religion,

And now, my lords, to conclude this letter, if you use your victory like generous conquerors, and instead of pursuing your advantage, do all in your power to soften and mitigate it ;—if you pity the difficulties we labour under, instead of triumphing over us, and shew a disposition to relieve us effectually at a more favourable opportunity ;—if you have only denied our request for the sake of having the subject of our claim more fully discussed, or ascertaining the sentiments of the whole body of dissenters, or with a view to a more perfect and comprehensive scheme of your own ;—if you think

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yourselves intitled to the honour of granting a more extensive indulgence, as having first passed the bill for toleration;—if you regard our separation as a matter of conscience, and not a principle of religious faction, and are desirous to indulge us as far as you can, consistent with the preservation of your own church;—if you treat us as friends and brethren, as fellow protestants and fellow Christians, engaged with you under the same banner against the common enemies of morality and religion;—if you do us the justice to believe, that we are animated by no motives but the love of truth, a regard to the honour of our religion, and a candid zeal for our natural and Christian rights;—if you think any encouragement due to us for so long and patient a resignation, to unmerited hardship for our loyalty, obedience, and affection to government;—if you acquit us of all suspicions of invading your privileges, and repose an honourable confidence in us, that we will
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never bring toleration into discredit by our abuse of it;—if you cease to asperse us as restless fanatics, or as enemies to revelation, or as designing men, who seek for a greater latitude from dishonest views;—if you disavow that unchristian principle of imposing creeds and articles, and have recourse to methods for securing your establishment more lenient, more reasonable, more agreeable to Christian liberty;—you will then be worthy of the title of a Christian church,—your power will excite no malice,—your immunities no envy,—your disinterestedness, generosity, and candour will give you an establishment infinitely greater and better than you can derive from the secular arm; in a word, you will set an example of lenity and liberty worthy of the imitation of all Christendom.

On the other hand, if elated by your success, and presuming upon the approbation of the whole kingdom, you aspire to more vigorous measures, and think we are
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to be subdued by wholesome severities ; if you think this a proper period for the revival of ecclesiastical dominion ; if, instead of having recourse to learning, exemplary piety, and the faithful discharge of your duty, as your best security, you trust solely to your interest in parliament, and your firm connection with the state ; if too wise to enforce persecution, you are not wise enough to decline all menaces ; if you are resolved to maintain the power of tormenting without necessity and without reason, and to keep alive cruel laws, in hopes this kingdom will one day be ignorant and superstitious enough to submit to them ; if, not content with your revenues, honours, and independency, you are for setting up an absolute sovereignty over conscience, granting and resuming opinions at your own arbitrary pleasure, deciding, condemning, and punishing, without appeal and without redress, disclaiming all argument but force, and ruling by the compendious method
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of fines and penalties ; if, without entering into the merits of our cause, you think it sufficient to brand us with odious names, which can only serve to expose us to the insult of ignorant and furious men ; if you conjure up the danger of the church, and the confusion of the last century, in order to excite commiseration for yourselves, and resentment against us ; if you foment party divisions, by representing us as a fanatical people, who are never to be satisfied, though we have no security for our persons and possessions for a moment, and as breathing vengeance against your hierarchy, tho' we are ready to give you every assurance you can ask on this head ; if you have recourse to the most glaring inconsistencies to injure our reputation, sometimes treating us as enthusiasts and methodists, who pretend to inspiration, and sometimes as profane sceptics, who, under pretence of exalting human reason, discredit revelation, and want to throw open the door to all kind of licentiousness ;

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sometimes as rivals, who grudge your emoluments, and are impatient to divide your patrimony ; sometimes as a peevish captious people, whom no condescension can mollify, and who reject all your overtures to reconciliation ; in short, if either policy, fear, or bigotry make you enemies to all amendment and toleration ; if you are determined to rivet your own chains and ours, and to continue every thing in the same state in which it has so long defied all the attempts of learning and knowledge ; you will be universally regarded as having an interest separate from truth and reason, hurtful to your country, and inconsistent with the interests of mankind ; a body of learned men, yet enemies to all knowledge ; a society of Christians, yet averse to the only principles upon which Christianity can flourish ; a community professing independency of the world, yet mercenary, avaricious, and selfish ; your preaching will lose its dignity, your prayers their efficacy, your pre-

pretensions to sanctity will deceive no longer, your votaries will only be those of superstition and ignorance, while the philosopher and the Christian will despise all your artifices. The state will measure your merit by your prostitution, and patronize you no longer than you disgrace your profession. In short, you will degenerate into a spiritual faction, endowed with a power mischievous to others, and in the end ruinous to yourselves : you may be dreaded, you may be envied, you may receive the homage of credulity and ignorance, but you will never be esteemed nor loved. When this is the case, your members will only consist of persons of the meanest spirit and worst principle. In a word, you will multiply your real enemies, while you gain no real friends ; you will make all sensible and discerning men as much dissenters from you, as you are from liberty, sound policy, rational religion, and true Christianity.

F I N I S.

A P P E N D I X.

An Extraet from the writings of Bishop Hoadley on the subject of religious Liberty,—wherein the principles contended for in the foregoing Letter are fully established.

IF the leaving every man freely, and without restraint, to make the best of his Bible, be such an unspeakable unhappiness, because of the wild conceits coming from ignorance, &c. for God's sake why was the world disturbed with a reformation at all, which would indeed have been only the dream or image of a reformation, without claiming this universal right of Christians, to all Christians equally? If this be such a terrible consequence as to justify human restraints, why was the popish restraint disturbed which would have prevented this mischief more effectually, if restraints could do it? Shall we still go on to mock mankind, and tell them that a popish restraint is indeed bad, but that a protestant restraint is very good and useful; that the Christian people have a right against any restraint but what we ourselves lay upon them; that the papists cannot judge who

of the laity are capable of the use of the scriptures, and who not, but that we can ; and the like ? It is time methinks to leave off such partiality to ourselves in the case of religion, and such insults upon our brethren, lest the meanest and most ignorant of them, by degrees, should come to see that we speak as if popish restraints had been removed, for our own sakes only and not for theirs. At the time of the reformation, the Christian world was sunk universally, clergy as well as laity, into a consummate stupidity and ignorance, not only as to what is called literature, but as to what is true Christianity. I beg it may be considered, first by what methods this miserable state of things was brought to such a pitch ; and then, by what methods it *was in so great measure* cured by the reformation ? The answer is in one word this, that the cause which was seen naturally to effect those evils was solely the taking away this right of judging from Christians, this supremacy which Christ vested in every Christian in his own behalf ; and lodging this supremacy in one man, or in a council of men over others : this made all enquiries useless and dangerous. Terrors and restraints were added, and neither clergy nor laity were allowed to make the best of their Bible. From hence came in necessarily a neglect of a matter so hazardous and ruinous as study and consideration ; and from hence, by degrees, an inundation of stupidity and ignorance.

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But when the evil of this came to be not only seen but felt to an intolerable degree, how was it cured? Not by preaching up the right of some to judge for others in religion; not by pronouncing the necessity of restraints in the case of the use of the scriptures; not by destroying the supremacy vested in every Christian in his own behalf, but by calling upon *all* equally to search the scriptures, by teaching that their own persuasions would justify their choice of church-communion, which they had a right to determine for themselves; that Christ had called them to this true Christian liberty, and had vested in every one of his followers this supremacy, which resulted from their right to follow their own consciences in religion, and which it was their duty to exercise. It was this, and this alone, which let the beams of divine light into that infernal prison of darkness, stupidity, and ignorance, which had enfeebled the eye-sight, and enslaved the hearts of mankind so long. It was this which revived Christianity as it were from the dead, by sending all to the fountain and original; and it was this alone which planted and increased true knowledge and freedom, instead of the blackness of darkness and the chains of slavery. If any *methods have since been made use of contrary to these maxims*, and inconsistent with these foundations, any restraints laid upon this Christian liberty, any discouragements to the freedom of enquiry and judgment of Christians, I am sorry for it. There is just so much given back to the cause of ignorance

and all its consequences, which must of necessity gain life, and recover strength just in proportion to the discouraging universal enquiry, and the private judgment of Christians in order to determine their own conduct in religion,

There is no medium in this case : either this supremacy must be lodged in every private Christian in his own behalf, or it must be lodged in some Christians over others in behalf of others ; either Christian liberty must be entrusted with Christians for themselves, so that they themselves must bear their own burthen, and answer to God for the use of what he has granted them, or else the Christian liberty of Christians must be lodged in the hands of superiors, to dispense, curtail, abridge, or enlarge, just as their measure of light and judgment, and too often as their interest or inclination, humour or passion, form their resolutions.—Either Christians have this right, every man in himself, by the principles of reason and the nature of true religion, and of the gospel in particular ; or, they have it not. If they have it, it differs in this from their civil rights, that *they themselves cannot rightfully give up the exercise of it*. In civil affairs they can give up the exercise of their rights by chusing, appointing, or consenting to, an arbitrator, judge, or governor, finally to determine their civil controversies between man and man ; but in the case of religion, supposing them once vested with the right before-mentioned, it is not in their power to give it up, because resulting from the
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nature of true religion, which requires choice and will in every particular man's own conduct ; no one can give it up without destroying the foundation of all that can be called religion in men. But if every private Christian has not this right in him, by what methods came superiors to have it ? They could not come to be possessed of it by concession from their inferiors, because inferiors are here supposed never to have had any such right to give up into the hands of others ; and as for any express declaration of the will of God in this case, the hardiest protestant has never yet declared *uniformly and in express* words, for a divine right (a right indeed requiring the knowledge, and infallibility, and authority of God himself) lodged in any superiors to judge in religion for themselves and others too, so as to preclude others from being finally determined, to conduct themselves according to their own inward persuasion.

Whoever declares this whether he knows it or no, declares himself no protestant ; I do not say a papist, because there may be several such as these, who intend nothing less than popery or foreign usurpation, which would unhappily put out their eyes, as they put out the eyes of others ; and exercise that supremacy of judging for them which they think intolerable, even whilst they desire themselves to exercise it over others.

And farther, whoever thinks to halve this right with their inferiors, to take it away in part, and leave it in part, do but deceive themselves with

vain words. It is in the nature and reason of the thing, an indivisible point which no human art can possibly make otherwise, and experience has shewn, and will ever shew, that it must either be left whole, *or in due time* taken away whole; there is no middle way between these.—I am sorry that I have had occasion to say so much; but I sincerely think it my duty to take every occasion to remind Christians of what alone makes them truly Christians, to engage them to love and value their own real privileges, and not to be jested or frightened out of that supremacy which God has vested in every man in his own behalf, and which is so far from leading to the destruction of Christianity or to the establishment of a consummate stupidity and ignorance, that I will presume to say, true Christianity cannot be even supposed without it; and I am sure experience says, that neither literature nor religious knowledge ever flourished or remained even in their shadows after this was once discarded, The nation never was I hope so weak and so regardless of the gospel, as to receive the ecclesiastical constitution of this realm as the religion delivered by Christ—All true consistent protestants receive the New Testament *only* as containing his religion. This is the religion of Christians considered as such, and this alone is their refuge, and the avowed standard of all their notions amidst their several and contradictory systems.—Another thing to be considered by all Christians is, that the religion delivered by Christ can be justly supported only

ly by Christ's methods. All the laws and acts of parliament in the world can only support an outward profession of something, which as far as it is received from men, and practised as the will of men, is so far different from the religion of Christ. They may keep up a human constitution, and either allure men by temporal rewards to adhere to the outward form of it, or terrify men by temporal inconveniences from departing from it, or indispense men by both from examining at all what it is for their ease and their-interest to take as it is offered to them. But the religion delivered by Christ as such, is not concerned in such laws. It subsisted, the sincere profession of it subsisted, not only without, but often against human laws; which is a demonstration that whatever it is that such laws are necessary to preserve, it is not the religion delivered by Christ, nor ought the people to be so imposed on as to be made to believe this.—I know better what a true affection to the church of England *in its present condition* imports, than to make it consist in thinking it given down immediately from Heaven, pure and blameless, without spot or wrinkle; and I know better, I hope, my duty to God and to Christ, than to prostitute the honour of the gospel to that of any human constitution in the world. I shall leave to others the glory of putting the ecclesiastical constitution of this realm and the religion delivered by Christ for synonymous terms, and content myself with the reproach of thinking the religion delivered by him to be some-

thing very different from all constitutions of realms; something which all Christians in common ought to appeal to, and to be determined by, amidst all their several schemes and systems; something of quite another nature than what can be supported by their several acts, and statutes, and laws framed in the different countries of this world, according to their several notions in favour of contradictory constitutions; and something which is best and most effectually preserved according to the will of Christ, by methods agreeable to the spirit of the gospel. See Hoadley's Rights of Subjects, *passim*.

A Letter on the maintainance of the clergy, and the project of appointing bishops in America, by a gentleman highly respected in the literary world, republished from a public paper of the 3d June, 1772.

S I R,

I Understand from the public papers, that in the debates on the bill for relieving the Dissenters in the point of subscription to the Church Articles, sundry reflections were thrown out against the people, importing, “ that they themselves are of a persecuting intolerant spirit, for that when they had the superiority, they persecuted the church, and still persecute it in America, where they compel its members to pay taxes for maintaining the Presbyterian or Independent worship, and at the same time refuse them a toleration in the full exercise of their religion, by the administrations of a bishop.

If we look back into history for the character of the present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not, in their turns, been persecutors and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the Pagans, but practised it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England blamed persecution in the Romish church, but practised it against the Puritans : these found it wrong in the
bishops,

bishops, but fell into the same practice both here and in New England. To account for this, we should remember, that the doctrine of *toleration* was not then known, or had not prevailed in the world. Persecution was therefore not so much the fault of the sect as of the times. It was not in those days deemed wrong *in itself*. The general opinion was only, that those *who are in error* ought not to persecute *the truth*: but the *possessors of truth* were in the right to persecute *error*, in order to destroy it. Thus every sect believing itself possessed of *all truth*, and that every tenet differing from theirs was *error*, conceived that when the power was in their hands, persecution was a duty required of them by that God whom they supposed to be offended with heresy.—By degrees more moderate *and more modest* sentiments have taken place in the Christian world; and among Protestants particularly, all disclaim persecution, none vindicate it, and few practise it. We should then cease to reproach each other with what was done by our ancestors, but judge of the present character of sects or churches by their *present conduct* only.

Now to determine on the justice of this charge against the present dissenters, particularly those in America, let us consider the following facts. They went from England to establish a new country for themselves, *at their own expence*, where they might enjoy the free exercise of religion in their own way. When they had purchased the
territory

territory of the natives, they granted the lands out in townships, requiring for it neither purchase-money nor quit-rent, but this condition only to be complied with, that the freeholders should support a gospel minister (meaning probably one of the then governing sects) and a free-school within the township. Thus, what is commonly called Presbyterianism became the *established religion* of that country. All went on well in this way, while the same religious opinions were general, the support of minister and school being raised by a proportionate tax on the lands. But, in process of time, some becoming Quakers, some Baptists, and of late years, some returning to the Church of England (through the laudable endeavours and a *proper application* of their funds by the society for propagating the gospel), objections were made to the payment of a tax appropriated to the support of a church they disapproved and had forsaken. The civil magistrates, however, continued for a time to collect and apply the tax according to the original laws which remained in force ; and they did it the more freely, as thinking it just and equitable that the holders of lands should pay what was contracted to be paid when they were granted, as the only consideration for the grant, and what had been considered by all subsequent purchasers as a perpetual incumbrance on the estate, bought therefore at a proportionably cheaper rate ; a payment which, it was thought, no honest man ought to avoid, under pretence of his having changed his religious

religious persuasion. And this, I suppose, is one of the best grounds of demanding tythes of dissenters now in England. But the practice being clamoured against by the episcopalians as persecution, the legislature of the province of Massachusetts Bay, near thirty years since, passed an act for their relief, requiring, indeed, the tax to be paid as usual, but directing that the several sums levied from members of the Church of England, should be paid over to the minister of that church with whom such members usually attended divine worship, which minister had power given him to receive, and, on occasion, *to recover the same by law.*

It seems that legislature considered the end of the tax was, to secure and improve the morals of the people, and promote their happiness by supporting among them the public worship of God and the preaching of the gospel ; that where particular people fancied a particular mode, that mode might probably therefore, be of most use to those people ; and that if the good was done, it was not so material in what mode or by whom it was done. The consideration that their brethren, the dissenters in England, were still compelled to pay tythes to the clergy of the church, had not weight enough with the legislature to prevent this moderate act, which still continues in full force, and I hope no uncharitable conduct of the church toward the dissenters will ever provoke them to repeal it.

With regard to a bishop, I know not upon what ground the dissenters, either here or in America,

rica, are charged with refusing the benefit of such an officer to the church in that country. *Here* they seem to have naturally no concern in the affair. *There* they have no power to prevent it, if government should think fit to send one. They would probably *dislike*, indeed, to see an order of men established among them, from whose persecutions their fathers fled into that wilderness, and whose future domination they might possibly fear, *not knowing that their natures are changed*. But the non-appointment of bishops for America seems to arise from another quarter. The same wisdom of government, probably, that prevents the sitting of convocations, and forbids, by *noli prosequi's*, the persecution of Dissenters for non-subscription, avoids establishing bishops where the minds of people are not yet prepared to receive them cordially, lest the public peace should be endangered.

And now let us see how this *persecution-account* stands between the parties.

In New England, where the legislative bodies are almost to a man dissenters from the Church of England :

1. There is no test to prevent churchmen holding offices.
2. The sons of churchmen have the full benefit of the universities.
3. The taxes for support of public worship, when paid by churchmen, are given to the episcopal minister.

In

In Old England :

1. Dissenters are excluded from all offices of profit and honour.

2. The benefits of education in the universities are appropriated to the sons of churchmen.

3. The clergy of the dissenters receive none of the tythes paid by their people, who must be at the additional charge of maintaining their own separate worship.—

But it is said, that the dissenters of America *oppose* the introduction of a bishop.

In fact, it is not alone the dissenters there that give the opposition (if *not encouraging* must be termed *opposing*) but the laity in general dislike the project, and some even of the clergy. The inhabitants of Virginia are almost all episcopalians. The church is fully established there, and the council and general assembly are, perhaps to a man, its members, yet, when lately at a meeting of the clergy, a resolution was taken to apply for a bishop, against which several, however, protested; the assembly of the province, at the next meeting, expressed their disapprobation of the thing in the strongest manner, by unanimously ordering the thanks of the house to the protesters; for many of the American laity of the church think it some advantage whether their own young men come to England for ordination, and improve themselves at the same time by conversation with the learned here, or the congregations are supplied by Englishmen who have had the benefit of education in English universities,

versities, and are ordained before they come abroad. They do not, therefore, see the necessity of a bishop merely for ordination, and confirmation is among them deemed a ceremony of no very great importance, since few seek it in England, where bishops are in plenty. These sentiments prevail with many churchmen there, not to promote a design which they think must sooner or later saddle them with great expences to support it. As to the dissenters their minds might probably be more conciliated to the measure if the bishops here should, in their wisdom and goodness, think fit to set their sacred character in a more friendly light, by dropping their opposition to the dissenters' application for relief in subscription, and declaring their willingness that dissenters should be capable of offices, enjoy the benefit of education in the universities, and the privilege of appropriating their tythes to the support of their own clergy. In all these points of toleration, they appear far behind the present dissenters of New England, and it may seem to some a step below the dignity of bishops, to follow the example of such inferiors. I do not, however, despair of their doing it some time or other, since nothing of the kind is too hard for *true Christian humility*.

I am, Sir, your's, &c. .

A NEW-ENGLAND-MAN.

Dr. Benj. Franklin

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